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**Educational Tourism: The influence of the Erasmus programme in  
Lisbon on students' perceptions to work abroad**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis studies the perceptions of incoming Erasmus students to Portugal regarding their decisions to work abroad in the future, and more specifically in that country. With an online-survey and by interviewing former exchange students, their motivations, experiences and implications for future work decisions, taking into consideration their stay in Portugal, were studied.

The results suggest that the Erasmus programme positively contributes to students' decisions to work abroad in the future. Nevertheless, coming back to Portugal is no feasible option for this group. The positive cultural circumstances are given but structural changes must be undertaken to make Portugal a more attractive country for employment.

**Keywords:** Educational Tourism; Erasmus; Portugal; student exchange; working abroad

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Abstract.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Exhibits .....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Literature Review.....	4
1.1. Cultural Tourism.....	4
1.2. Educational Tourism.....	5
1.3. Erasmus Programme.....	7
1.3.1. Erasmus Programme in Portugal .....	9
3. Methodology and Data Collection.....	9
3.1. Research Method .....	9
4. Analysis and Results.....	11
1.4. Sample Characterisation .....	11
1.5. Main Results .....	11
1.5.1. Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme.....	12
1.5.2. The contribution of culture .....	14
1.5.3. Future work decisions.....	17
1.5.4. Studying in Portugal .....	20
5. Conclusion .....	20
6. Outlook & Recommendations.....	22
7. Limitations .....	23
References.....	24
Appendices.....	27

## EXHIBITS

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Exhibit 1: Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme - combined.....	12
Exhibit 2: Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme - separated.....	13
Exhibit 3: Interest in Portuguese culture before stay .....	15
Exhibit 4: Interest in Portuguese culture after stay.....	15
Exhibit 5: Important factors for future work decisions - combined.....	19
Exhibit 6: Important factors for future work decisions - separated .....	19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Despite accelerating globalisation and mobility among students and professionals, there is still a skills gap in Europe. Many young people are unemployed, with unemployment levels up to 43% (Statista 2017a), and at the same time companies have difficulties to find staff with specific skills. Not only technical skills but also soft skills like independence, foreign language proficiency and intercultural competency, which are often acquired by doing an exchange programme during higher education, are related with higher employability (European Commission 2016). The Erasmus programme aims at addressing this gap by providing the opportunity to study and gain experience abroad. Nevertheless, a large part of mobility was vertical in the past with students and workers moving to richer countries and regions in order to gain economic advantages (Teichler and Jahr 2001). In the light of the economic crisis in 2009, this so-called brain drain also proved true for Portugal in the past years. Brain drain from Portugal has been focus of research in the last decade as the exodus of skilled workforce, after completion of a university degree, is more significant than in other European countries (Cerdeira et al. 2016). Nevertheless, in recent years, income student mobility has been growing faster than outgoing mobility. The climate, location and leisure opportunities contribute to the growing number of incoming exchange students (Sin, Tavares, and Neave 2017), but it might also be a side-effect of the overall growing popularity of Portugal, and particularly Lisbon, as one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in Europe (Turner and Freiermuth 2017). Therefore, this thesis aims at exploring the contribution of the Erasmus programme in Portugal to foreign students' perceptions about working abroad in the future, and more specifically in Portugal. It should be investigated if the cultural experiences during the stay might be able to reverse the brain drain and promote incoming mobility for employment in Portugal after completion of the Erasmus programme in Portugal.

The hypothesis assumes that the experiences made during participation in the Erasmus programme in Portugal contribute to students' decisions to work abroad in the future in general, and more specifically in Portugal. It should be examined if through different cultural experiences students have positive perceptions about moving abroad for employment in general and if there are any given factors that make Portugal an attractive destination. Therefore, the hypothesis can be divided into two different parts:

**H1:** The participation in the Erasmus programme in Portugal positively influences (former) students' perceptions to work in a country other than their origin in the future.

**H2:** The participation in the Erasmus programme in Portugal positively influences (former) students' perceptions not only about working abroad, but more specifically working in Portugal.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

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In order to better understand the context in which the Erasmus programme and therefore a student exchange takes place, the subsequent section includes a discussion about the main concepts - cultural and educational tourism – that are relevant for this work. Afterwards, an overview of the Erasmus programme and its history should be given.

### **1.1. Cultural Tourism**

Tourism is a very broad field but in general it “comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year, for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” as defined by the World Tourism Organisation (Cooper et al. 1999). It can be distinguished into many different forms, with cultural tourism being one of the largest and fastest growing tourism markets. Around 40% of international

visitors are considered cultural tourists who include cultural visits or activities as part of their travels (OECD 2009). McKercher et al. (2012) see cultural tourism as an interrelationship between the four elements *tourism, use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences and products* and *the tourist* and classify the many definition that exist for cultural tourism in different categories. For the purpose of this work, taking into consideration the Erasmus programme, experiential definitions of cultural tourism are relevant which include experiencing the heritage, special character and local community of a country. These experiences contribute to becoming educated, but also to being entertained (McKercher et al. 2012).

## **1.2. Educational Tourism**

Cultural tourism also comprises the rather under-researched but slowly recognised discipline of educational tourism, which enhances the performance of the tourism industry by combining education and tourism. The primary motivation of educational tourism derives from learning and education, while tourism activities like travelling, leisure activities and visiting cultural sites are only secondary motivations, usually done during free time (Lam, Ariffin, and Ahmad 2011). Nevertheless, experiencing new cultures and social norms is an important aspect that educational tourists seek apart from formally acquiring knowledge (Abubakar, Shneikat, and Oday 2014).

Travelling for the purpose of learning, acquiring new skills and broadening one's horizon, also about other cultures, dates back to ancient times when travelling was undertaken to acquire knowledge about other civilised people (Klooster 2014). Nevertheless, academic research is still limited in this field, partly because it is a "broad and complicated area" (Ritchie et al. 2003) and partly because there is "a lack of consensus regarding the nature and scope of educational tourism" (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017b).

However, some definitions exist, with Bodger (1998) being one of the first authors to refer to a “program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location”. According to this definition, educational tourism is limited to travelling in groups. Ritchie et al. (2003) provide a segmentation model for educational tourism which is seen as an international standard that considers the overlap between education and tourism (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017a). Here, education and learning are the primary or secondary purpose of a trip which comprises all kinds of study tours and university students’ travel including exchange programmes and language programmes. It can either be formally organised or undertaken individually (Ritchie et al. 2003). Nevertheless, with this market segmentation model, there is the risk of excluding certain segments in which education might be an important activity (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017b). Therefore, Pitman et al. (2010) propose a process approach where the learning component of the travel is core to the delivery of the product and mention *three key features* that must be fulfilled: (1) the trip has to be intentional to acquire knowledge, (2) the learning style should be experiential and (3) it should be structured around an educational programme. They describe it as a “deliberate and explicit learning experience” (Pitman et al. 2010) that requires active participation of the educational tourists. Taking the above-mentioned aspects into account and focusing on the lens of business students, Klooster (2014) defines educational tourism as “a programme in which participants travel to a foreign location, individually or as a group, with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience related to the development of cross-cultural competencies, management competencies or personal development”.

Based on research done so far in this discipline, McGladdery & Lubbe (2017b) try to conceptualise educational tourism and offer an alternative model which is both process-driven and outcomes-based and should serve as a basis for the present thesis. According to

them, clearly defined and appropriate outcomes of the learning experience need to be developed in three categories: (1) *cognitive outcomes* which measure the knowledge acquired, (2) *affective outcomes* which measure new attitudes and a new way of thinking and (3) *behavioural outcomes* that focus on newly developed skills. Global learning can be added as an objective if the educational travel takes place in an international context with a different cultural environment. For this model to be effective, visitors need to have touristic experiences that are different from their frame of reference and appropriate for education. Also, tourists actively should have the desire to learn, for instance carried out through formal academic courses (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017b).

One initiative that formalises such academic courses for students within Europe, with 33 countries participating, is the Erasmus programme which will be elaborated in detail below.

### **1.3. Erasmus Programme**

The Erasmus programme is a higher education exchange programme by the European Union (EU) which was in its first form established in June 1987, built on a pilot programme that was undertaken by the European Commission in the previous six years. The idea was to promote a cross-cultural exchange within the European Union to increase students' international understanding, to extend foreign language proficiency and to prepare them for an increasingly globalised world (Klooster 2014), with the original objectives being defined as the following:

- “to achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities (...) spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, (...);
- to promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities in all Member States;
- to harness the full intellectual potential of the universities in the Community (...);
- to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view



to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe;

- to ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation (...)" (Council of Ministers 1987)

The programme is named after the Dutch travelling scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536) who worked and lived in many European countries to expand his knowledge and broaden his horizon with different experiences. At the same time, the term Erasmus is an acronym which means *European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students* (European Commission 2003). Until 2007, the Erasmus programme existed under the umbrella of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which combined programmes aiming at promoting learning and education for people at all ages across Europe (European Commission 2013a). Starting in 2014, the Erasmus programme is now part of the 7-year Erasmus+ framework with a budget of €14.7 billion, which provides funding for education, training, youth and sports. Around 2 million students from a higher education institution will benefit from this programme between 2014 and 2020 (European Commission 2013b).

Literature shows that students participating in the Erasmus programme seek both professional and personal growth as well as the possibility to travel and to experience adventure (González, Mesanza, and Mariel 2011; Lesjak et al. 2015). Also, The Erasmus Impact Study shows that reasons for studying abroad range from the opportunity to live abroad and meet new people to develop language- and soft skills, but also to improve and widen career prospects, both in the home country and internationally (European Commission 2016). Furthermore, the characteristics of the host country influence students' decisions of where to complete the programme, including living costs, climate, leisure opportunities and language. The Erasmus programme, with students being educational tourists, also contributes to a large extend to the tourism industry within Europe. The

motives of participating in such programme can also be seen through a tourism lens, with cultural and experiential factors as main determinants (Lesjak et al. 2015).

### ***1.3.1. Erasmus Programme in Portugal***

Portugal plays an important role in the Erasmus programme, facing an overall rising mobility, but being an importer country with more incoming than outgoing students (Sin, Tavares, and Neave 2017). This number has been rising on average over the past 10 years, with incoming Erasmus students of already 9.853 in the year 2016 (Agência Nacional Erasmus 2017). A significant number of these incoming students choose to do their exchange programme in the Lisbon area, which has the highest concentration of universities in the whole country, with some of them being among the top receiving institutions across Europe (Sin, Tavares, and Neave 2017). The yearly number of incoming Erasmus students to Lisbon grew from 1.024 to 3.942 between the millennium and the year 2013 (Malet Calvo, Nofre, and Gerales 2017). Nevertheless, the country is, like most member states, struggling to meet the target of 20% by 2020 for student mobility, as set by the European Commission (2003b). Most of the incoming students are from Spain, due to its proximity, Poland, France, Germany and Turkey, because of Portugal's relatively lower costs of living and appealing location and climate.

## **3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

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The following section aims at providing an overview of the research method used for answering the research questions.

### **3.1. Research Method**

The research for this work is based on a mixed approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative data collections: in-depth semi-structured interviews (#10) with former

Erasmus students coming to Lisbon and online-questionnaires (#121) with the same group, but a different sample. As mentioned above, Lisbon receives most of the incoming exchange students to Portugal, therefore, research was only focused on this group. Using a multiple-case methodology allows to get detailed insights from participants as well as useful statistical data from a larger sample group.

In order to collect a large number of quantitative data, the online platform Qualtrics was chosen to create and distribute the survey. The research software has the advantage of the possibility of customising the survey with countless options regarding structure and question types. Also, Qualtrics provides a link to the survey that can simply be copied and sent to potential respondents. Data was collected for 21 days and the survey was mainly distributed via social media platforms such as Facebook and via personal invitations through email. Nevertheless, with this type of data collection the researcher does not have high control regarding the respondent's environment or level of concentration when taking the survey. In order to minimise potential distractions, the survey was kept short and simple, with 23 only closed-response questions with an average response time of 5.43 minutes. 154 respondents started to fill out the online-survey; nevertheless, some were invalid or not entirely completed. Therefore, only 121 responses were considered for the final analysis.

Furthermore, as the findings also strongly depend on feelings and experiences that are associated with the Erasmus exchange, qualitative data was additionally used that aim at underlining the findings based on quantitative data gathered from the survey. For the qualitative part of the research, interviews were conducted both face-to-face with participants who currently live in Portugal and via Skype with participants living in other countries. The semi-structured interviews took around 10 minutes each and were recorded to be able to refer back at a later point in time. This interview type was chosen as it gives the author the possibility of changing the course of the interview, although there is a pre-

determined set of opened questions.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

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### **1.4. Sample Characterisation**

To provide an accurate overview of the final sample, some demographic characteristics have been analysed. Regarding the gender, the sample was mostly female (60%). The majority of respondents was aged between 22 and 23 years (40%), followed by people in the age group between 24 and 25 years (34%). Only a minority was aged above 26 years (9%), as the sample mostly consisted of students (69%), or recent graduates. As far as the nationality is concerned, most participants were Italian (22%), followed by France (14%), Germany (10%) and Spain (8%). In total, respondents from 23 different European countries answered the survey. The majority of respondents completed the Erasmus programme either in the fall semester 2016/17 (55%) or in the spring semester 2017 (31%). The largest part came from the field of social sciences (95%), with Business and Economics (86%) being the most frequent disciplines. Also, in 90% of the cases, Universidade Nova de Lisboa was the host university for incoming Erasmus students. As far as the levels of studies are concerned, 65% of respondents did their exchange in Lisbon as part of their Bachelors degree, the remainder as part of a graduate programme. A detailed description of the demographic characteristics can be found in Appendix 3.

### **1.5. Main Results**

In the following section, the main findings will be analysed by combining the results from the quantitative and qualitative data collection. First, each of the topics covered will be addressed separately to provide a complete overview of the results. After, in the subsequent

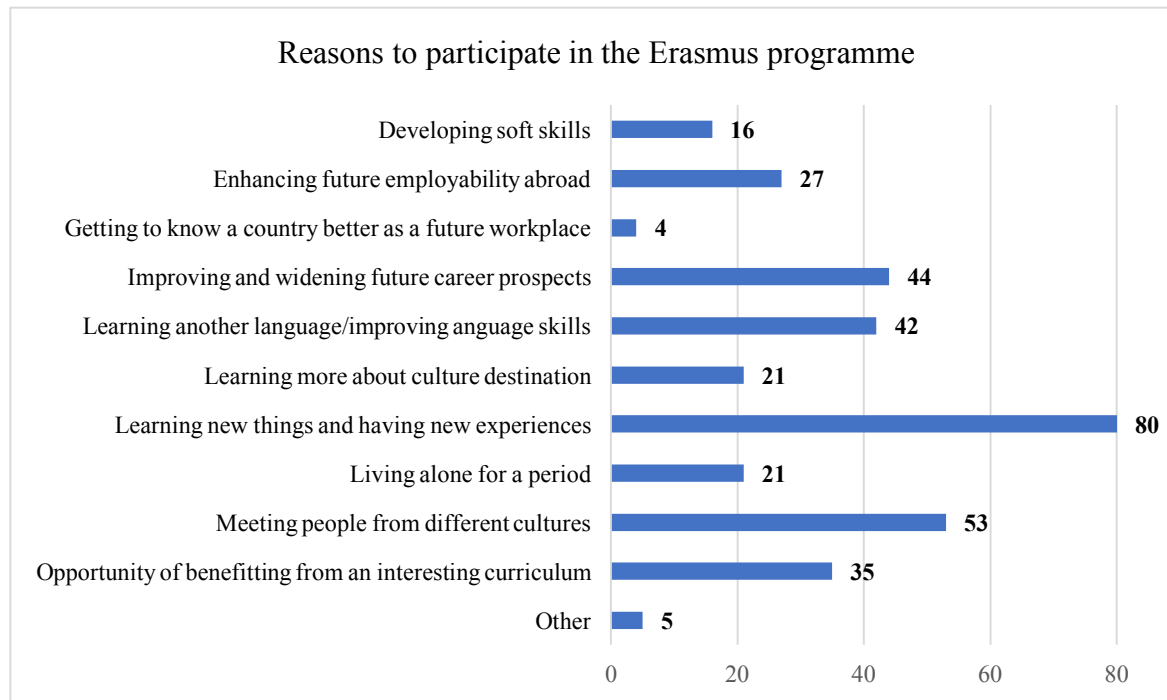
chapter, the insights gathered will be combined in order to better respond to the research questions and to draw conclusions from the analysis.

### ***1.5.1. Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme***

When looking at reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme, participants were given a list of 10 reasons and were asked to choose 3 and rank them according to the relative importance for them. These reasons refer to participating in the Erasmus programme in general and not specifically related to Portugal. The reason that was by far chosen the most was *“I wanted to learn new things and have new experience”*, selected by 80 respondents. Second and third most chosen were *“I wanted to meet people from different cultures”* and *“I wanted to improve and widen my career prospects in the future”* which were selected 53 and 44 times respectively. An overview of all different reasons provides Exhibit 1 below.

#### **Exhibit 1: Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme - combined**

Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017

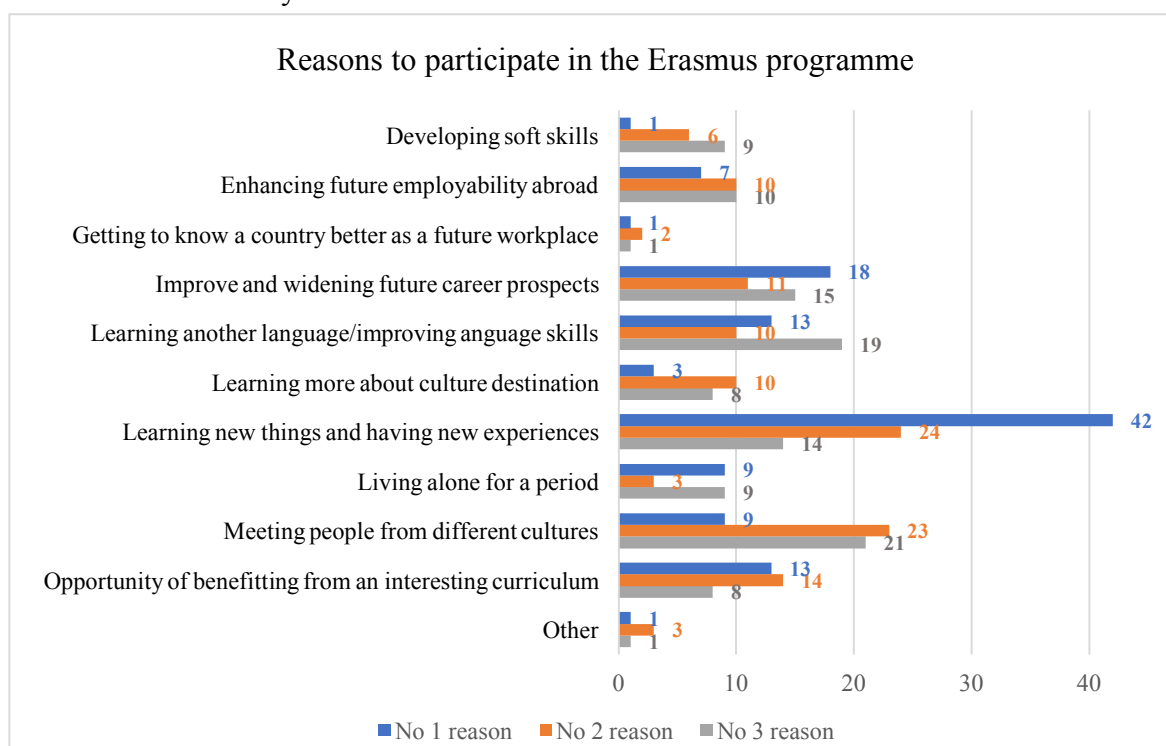


Nevertheless, when analysing the reasons for participating in the Erasmus programme in terms of the order they were ranked, the situation looks slightly different (see Exhibit 2).

Learning new things and having new experiences was still reported by 42 participants as number one reason. However, meeting new people from different cultures was the primary reason for only 9 respondents, although it ranked second overall. Improving future career prospects was moderately important for participants, after all it was the main reason for 18 respondents to participate in the Erasmus programme. Nevertheless, not necessarily in regards to employability abroad which was only chosen 7 times as primary reason.

## Exhibit 2: Reasons to participate in the Erasmus programme - separated

Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017



As described above, the sample mostly consisted of students who did the exchange during their Bachelors degree. At that stage of their academic lives, students are aware that student mobility might benefit their future careers, as confirmed by prior research, (European Commission 2014; Bryła 2015) but thinking specifically about employability abroad might not be as relevant as at a later point in time. That also proves true for the reason “*I wanted to get to know the country better as I consider it as a future workplace*”. When choosing a destination for completing the Erasmus programme, other factors that affect the near future

are more relevant, especially when the country is still unknown for students. Also, since the exchange was the first time being abroad for a longer period of time for many participants, they have no point of reference in terms of experiences abroad.

### *1.5.2. The contribution of culture*

As this thesis aims at investigating whether Portugal is an attractive destination for former Erasmus students to work and live in the future, it is important to understand if it was the preferred country to do the exchange. For the majority (70%), Portugal, and more specifically Lisbon, was the first choice to do the Erasmus programme. Reasons identified during the interviews were related to the location in the south of Europe, the weather, the language and the relatively lower living costs, which is consistent with existing literature (Sin, Tavares, and Neave 2017).

*“I didn’t know the country at all and wanted to go to the south of Europe, so I was curious to discover Portugal.”* - Full-time employee from France, 24

*“I wanted to stay in a warm country in Europe and heard that Lisbon was a great student city.”* - Student from Belgium, 22

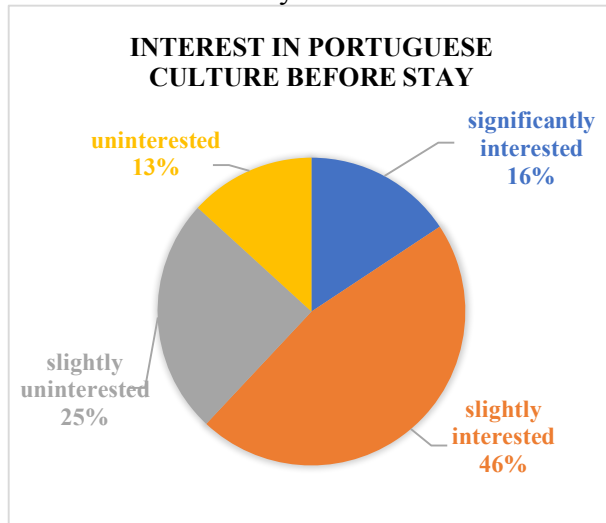
*“I wanted to learn Portuguese and stay in Europe, that’s why I came here.”* - Student from Germany, 24

*“I wanted to go to a country that is different from my home country in terms of climate and culture”* - Full-time employee from Finland, 28

Of the remaining 30%, students originally wanted to do the Erasmus programme in countries like Spain (26%), Italy (14%), the UK (11%) or France (9%), but ended up coming to Portugal as they didn’t get their first destination of choice. The fact that Spain and Italy were the top destinations for students whose priority was not Portugal shows a certain interest in Southern European cultures with a Mediterranean climate. Although most respondents wanted to do the Erasmus programme in Portugal, only a minority (16%) was significantly increased in the Portuguese culture before the stay, however, 46% were at least slightly interested (see Exhibit 3).

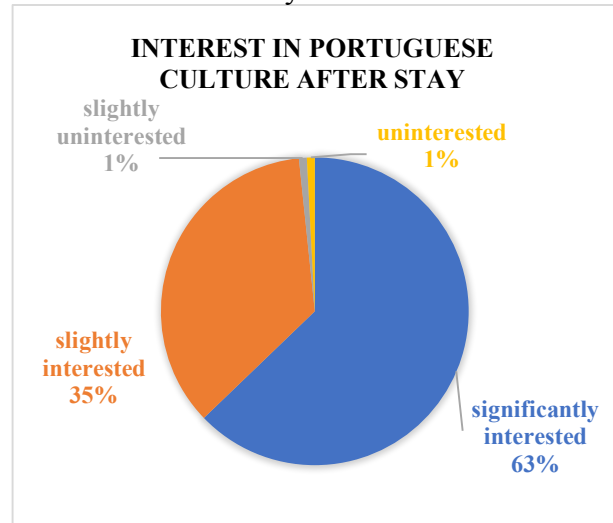
### Exhibit 3: Interest in Portuguese culture before stay

Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017



### Exhibit 4: Interest in Portuguese culture after stay

Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017



*"I didn't know a lot about Portugal before and didn't think about it."* – Student from Germany, 24

*"I thought the culture would be closer to the Spanish culture."* – Student from Belgium, 22

*"I never considered the Portuguese culture before my stay."* – Student from Italy, 23

Literature shows that culture is an important factor among others for choosing a destination for doing an exchange programme (Lesjak et al. 2015; Keogh and Russel-Roberts 2009), but from the results obtained the conclusion can be drawn that the Portuguese culture was not the main determinant for incoming students to do the Erasmus programme. Most students did not know the culture before, and were also not significantly interested in it. Nevertheless, other factors like the weather and lower costs of living predominantly influenced exchange students' decisions to come to Portugal.

The results after completion of the exchange programme looked totally different as 63% were significantly interested and 35% were slightly interested. Only 2% were still slightly uninterested or uninterested in the culture of Portugal after their stay (see Exhibit 4). It can be concluded that participants made positive experiences with the Portuguese culture during their stay, which was also reflected in the interviews.

*"I didn't know a lot about Portugal before but now it's my favourite country in the world."* –

Student from Germany, 24



*“In 4 months, I got to really understand the culture and people”* - Student from Belgium, 22  
*“I believe the Portuguese culture is fascinating, especially when you start to learn the language  
and feel the connection.”* - anonymous  
*“The cultural experience was great, especially because I had a lot of Portuguese colleagues in my  
university.”* - Student from Italy, 23

Not only an increase in interest in the Portuguese culture could be determined, but respondents stated that the Erasmus programme also increased their cultural knowledge in general. 73% totally agree with that and 24% slightly agree. This was also confirmed by The Erasmus Impact Study (2014), where intercultural understanding was found to be developed while being abroad. The participation in the Erasmus programme does not only allow for a deeper understanding of the host culture but enhances cultural knowledge in general due to interaction with other students from a lot of different nationalities. Although meeting people from different cultures was not the primary reason to do the Erasmus programme, it significantly contributed to an overall increased cultural knowledge.

In the interviews, also cultural differences between Portugal and the participants' home countries were covered. Factors that were predominantly mentioned were a higher flexibility of Portuguese people but at the same time organisational processes were perceived to take longer. Respondents had the perception of things being less organised and therefore more time consuming. On the other hand, the general atmosphere was described to be much happier and people were said to be warmer and friendlier. Less strict processes were mostly perceived as positive and contributed to eliminating stress in daily life. In general, there could be found positive and negative aspects about the Portuguese culture compared to the participants' home countries.

*“Everything is slower and not always organised, sometimes I missed that.”* - Full-time employee from France, 24  
*“Portuguese people are more easy going and not as strict as Germans, which is most of the  
time positive.”* - Student from Germany, 24

*“People are not accountable, when you need something you don’t get it.”* - Student from the Netherlands, 23

*“I had to slow down in order to be comfortable.”* - Student from Norway, 23

Although negative cultural differences were noticeable by participants, especially by those, whose home country appears to be culturally more distant from Portugal, e.g. Norway and France, the majority could get familiar and felt comfortable with the Portuguese culture upon completion of their Erasmus programme. Only one respondent from the Netherlands, which also belongs to the group of Northern European countries that have a large cultural distance from Southern European countries, could not find any positive aspects in the local culture (Kaasa, Vadi, and Varblane 2016).

### ***1.5.3. Future work decisions***

Participants, both in the online-survey and in the interviews, were not only asked about their Erasmus experience in Portugal but also expectations and perceptions about their future work life were covered. The majority of respondents (78%) wanted to work in an international context for sure and 20% slightly agree that they want to do so in the future. Only very few participants slightly disagree (1%) or disagree (1%) with wanting to work in an international context. As international context, a multinational company, a job that requires frequent travel or having transnational tasks can be considered. In addition to that, 63% are even considering to work abroad. Another 30% are slightly considering to move abroad after their studies and 7% slightly disagree with that. No respondent completely disagrees with working abroad in the future, which reflects on the international and multicultural mind-set and respective soft skills that are acquired during an Erasmus programme. The increased cultural knowledge mentioned above can be linked to the perception of working abroad in the future by most respondents (63%) as this refers to generally increased cultural sensitivity due to contact with people from different cultures.

*“The Erasmus programme has changed my view on working abroad, I definitely want to go abroad for some years, but not for my whole life.”* – Student from Germany, 24

*“If I didn’t make this exchange, I would be working in my home country right now.”* – Full-time employee from France, 24

The students have experienced that after completing their exchange in Portugal, they have the necessary skills to adapt to a new culture and therefore the majority can imagine working abroad. The positive experience of being exposed to an international environment is the main determinant of having perceptions of working in a different country after studying. Furthermore, 23% of respondents are already living in a country other than their origin, either to work or to study.

Nevertheless, when it comes to working in Portugal in specific, only 18% totally agree that they would consider to work in this country. Many respondents also slightly agreed (38%) and slightly disagreed (35%) and 11% stated to disagree. This contrasts with the generally positive perceptions about working in a country different from their origin. From the interviews, it can be extracted that a salient reason for that is connected to lower wages than in other European countries and was the first thing that came to participant’s minds. The majority could imagine to live in Portugal, but not to work. In general, thoughts on that matter were expressed as follows:

*“Working in Portugal would be a nice option in terms of lifestyle but not in terms of salary.”* – Student from Germany, 24

*“I could totally imagine living here but if I consider the wages, I don’t want to work here.”* – Student from Germany, 24

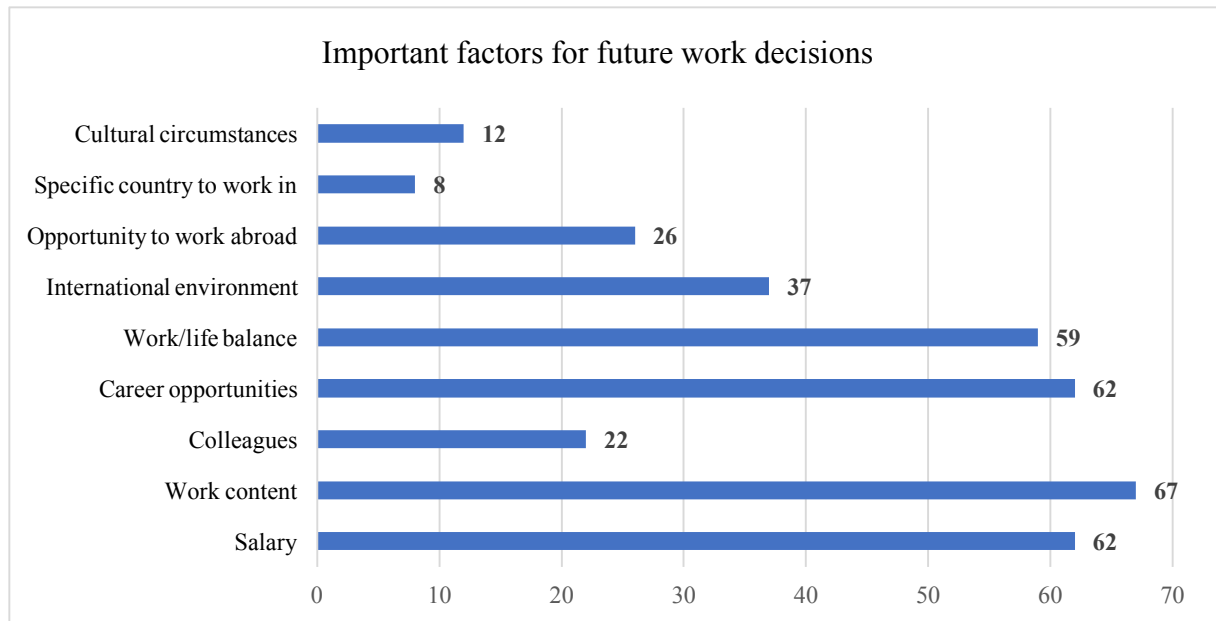
*“Concerning the way of life I would totally live here but it’s not that easy to find a work in Portugal, the work market is difficult.”* – Full-time employee from France, 24

Participants were also asked about important factors for future work decisions, both in the online-survey and the interview. A list of 9 reasons was given, with “*work content*” being the most frequent reason, followed by “*salary*” and “*career opportunities*” as the second frequent and “*work/life balance*” afterwards. Other reasons were not considered as

important as the ones mentioned, which can be seen in Exhibit 5. Participants were again asked to choose 3 main factors and rank them according to their relative importance.

#### **Exhibit 5: Important factors for future work decisions - combined**

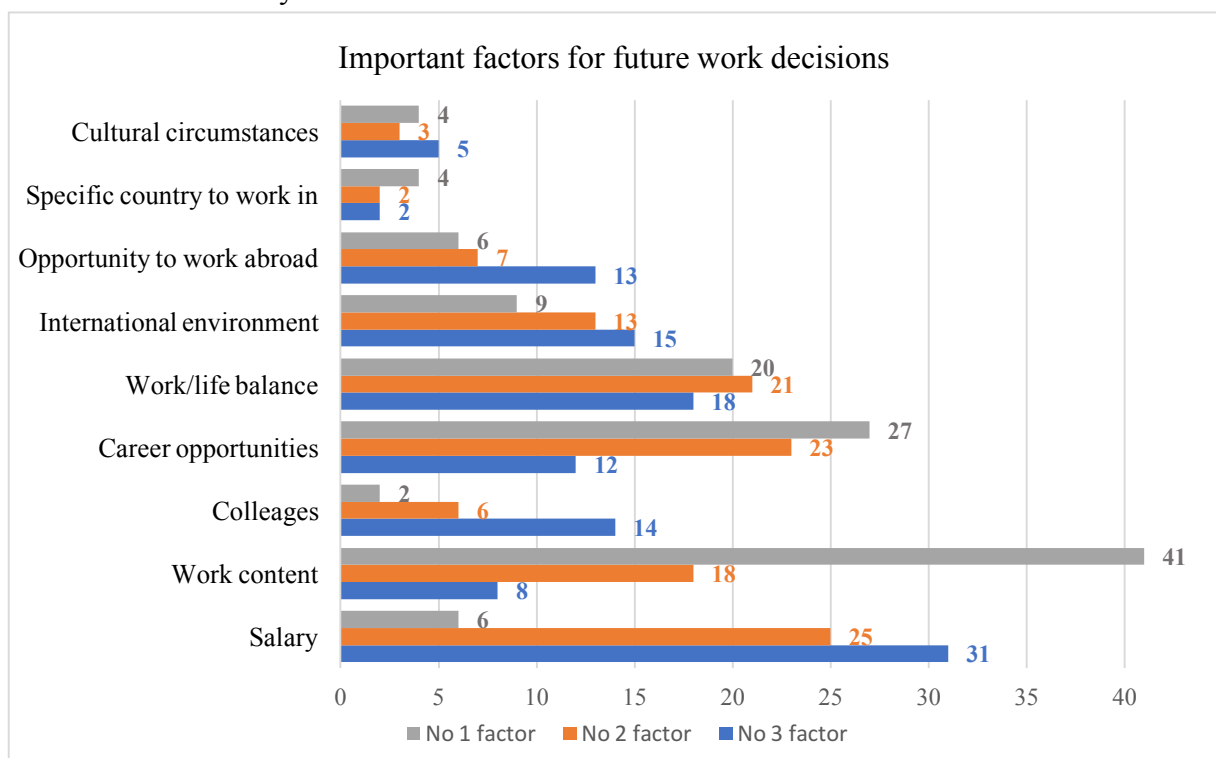
Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017



In addition, the order in which the factors were ranked was also analysed, which can be found in Exhibit 6.

#### **Exhibit 6: Important factors for future work decisions - separated**

Source: online-survey 30.10-20.11.2017



Here, the factor that was ranked first is also the “*work content*”, but “*salary*”, which ranked second overall, was only chosen by 6 people as main determinant for a future work decision. Therefore, participants consider salary an important factor when taking on a job, but other determinants are even more important. This also reflects in the interviews where salary was never the first factor mentioned, but rather the work content, work atmosphere or work/life balance as most important factors for a satisfying job. However, as mentioned before, when talking about Portugal as a future country to work in, low salary was always immediately mentioned as the downside.

#### ***1.5.4. Studying in Portugal***

As mentioned above, 23% of respondents that filled out the online-survey are currently living abroad, either to work or to study, some of them in Portugal. In addition, 5 out of 10 people who were interviewed are currently living in Lisbon, all of them are currently doing their Masters degree there. It is noticeable that all of them came back to Lisbon after doing the Erasmus programme, either because of the education system or the overall positive experience during their exchange.

*“...it changed my life, I would not do my Master’s at Nova if I did not do the Erasmus.” –*  
anonymous

*“I really liked the teaching style and the way professors would engage with students.” – Student*  
from Germany, 24

*“It’s a country where I want to come back all the time.” – anonymous*

*“I really liked the country, the city and the school itself, that’s why I came back.” - Student from*  
Germany, 24

## **5. CONCLUSION**

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Although the primary purpose of the Erasmus programme is academic enhancement that requires adaption both to a new and different academic environment and to the host country, students take much more out of this programme. For the findings of the underlying work,

being exposed to a different culture enhances both their cultural knowledge about Portugal, as well as the general cultural awareness and sensitivity due to ongoing contact with students from many different nationalities and backgrounds. The majority had very positive experiences with the Portuguese culture, although some negative differences with their home countries were noticeable. Portugal was mainly an unknown destination for students, they commenced their exchange programme with little expectations in terms of culture but these were exceeded after getting to know the country better. What was noticeable during the course of research for this thesis is that many people who already completed the Erasmus programme during their undergraduate degree came back to Lisbon to complete a Masters degree. This is a good evidence for being comfortable with the Portuguese culture after their stay and even more the desire to get to know the country even better by committing to spend additional time studying there. Also, this is in favour of the Portuguese university system, which offers high quality education that is increasingly becoming attractive for foreign students, also because of the existing offer of degrees that can be entirely completed in English.

In general, after the research for this thesis it can be concluded that the completion of the Erasmus programme in Portugal positively influences students' perceptions about working in a country different than their origin, due to the positive experience with different cultures during their stay. The first hypothesis (H1) of this work can therefore be accepted. Nevertheless, this does not prove true for Portugal, although circumstances are given that make it an attractive country to live, but not necessarily to work in. Participants like the way the lifestyle, and perceive life to be positive but the downside are salary and working conditions. In general, (former) students are opened towards living in Portugal, but not under the current circumstances. The second hypothesis (H2) can therefore be rejected, as the Erasmus programme in Portugal does not necessarily increase students' perception of

working in Portugal in the future.

## **6. OUTLOOK & RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Research for this thesis has shown that despite positive experiences with the country and the Portuguese culture, students don't consider Portugal as a future workplace. This calls for changes in the local labour market, otherwise the current exodus of skilled workforce will lead to serious problems. Circumstances must be changed in a way to not only prevent brain drain from the country, but to also attract foreign talent to the country. After already experiencing Portugal and its culture during an exchange programme, incentives must be given for people to stay or come back to work there. Changes should be implemented on both micro and macro level.

Many students already come back for their Masters degree, nevertheless, universities, and especially Nova SBE, can actively implement programmes that aim at making the Portuguese employment market more attractive for the growing number of foreign students. For instance, the Masters in Management intake in fall 2017 already comprised 44.6% international students (Nova SBE 2017a). These students receive a high-quality education by a school that strives "to serve the local market (...) to overcome the predicaments of Portugal's regional, cultural and economic confinement" as stated in Nova SBE's vision (Nova SBE 2017b). Nevertheless, this is going to be hard to achieve as many foreign students leave again after completing the study programme.

Furthermore, structural changes should be undertaken on a larger scale by the government. The research in this thesis has shown that salaries are not the main driving factor for future work decisions, nevertheless, it was the first reason mentioned for why Portugal is not an attractive country to work in. Although students value other factors more than simply high salaries, this aspect is negatively connoted with the Portuguese labour

market. If a highly educated, diverse workforce could be attracted, productivity would be higher, which in turn contributes to economic stability. As the OECD Economic Survey (2017) shows, Portugal still has a low skilled labour force with income being unequally distributed and jobs and earnings being below the OECD average. Unemployment remains relatively high at 9.4% in 2017 (Statista 2017b), while at the same time there is a lack of sufficient managerial skills among the local population, which accounts for part of the productivity gap (OECD 2017). This could be reversed by not only promoting higher education among the local population, but also by attracting foreign workforce with the necessary skills. Paying higher wages and providing better opportunities for employees to advance in their careers can significantly contribute to making Portugal an attractive country to work in as other factors that are important for a high quality of life might already be given.

## **7. LIMITATIONS**

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Even though this thesis provides some interesting insights on incoming student mobility to Portugal and the experiences during an Erasmus programme in general, some limitations need to be considered. First, as the online-survey was mainly distributed through social media platforms and personal e-mail invitations, control over the thoroughness of answers was relatively low. It is therefore uncertain whether questions were answered honestly and correctly.

Furthermore, the interconnectedness of students of the same university on social media platforms explains the high number of participants that studied the field of Business and Economics at Nova SBE (>85%). In a discipline, which focuses on an international outlook that can be adapted to different countries and industries, results might be slightly distorted. The results obtained in this work might look different if the sample consisted of



more students from other academic backgrounds. In general, a larger sample size could improve the overall significance of the survey.

As the focus of research was the Erasmus experience in Lisbon and the subsequent willingness to work in a foreign country, another limitation is that not specifically the exchange in Portugal contributes to students' decisions to do so. Similar results could have also been obtained in different countries when it comes to the general positive perception about working abroad. The Erasmus programme is not only limited to the experiences made in specific cultural circumstances but is also strongly determined by meeting new people from different nationalities and by having new experiences that would not have been made in the respective home countries and by generally being away from home.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix 1: Online - Survey Questions

This survey is targeted at former Erasmus students in Lisbon and will help me to successfully develop my master thesis at Nova SBE. I really appreciate 5min of your time to answer to the short questionnaire. If anything is not clear or if you have any additional thoughts on that topic, do not hesitate to email me: [katharina.lampl@novasbe.pt](mailto:katharina.lampl@novasbe.pt).

Thank you in advance and good luck!

Q1: How old are you?

- ☐ 18-19
- ☐ 20-21
- ☐ 22-23
- ☐ 24-25
- ☐ 26-30

Q2: What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Q3: What is your current occupation?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Full-time employee
- ☐ Part-time employee
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Internship
- ☐ Other:

Q4: What is your country of origin?

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium

- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czech Republic
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estland
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Liechtenstein
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Macedonia
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Rumania
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Switzerland
- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ UK
- ☐ Other:

Q5: In which year and semester have you done the Erasmus programme?

- ☐ Before fall semester 2012/13
- ☐ Fall semester 2012/13
- ☐ Spring semester 2013
- ☐ Fall semester 2013/14
- ☐ Spring semester 2014
- ☐ Fall semester 2014/15
- ☐ Spring semester 2015
- ☐ Fall semester 2015/16
- ☐ Spring semester 2016
- ☐ Fall semester 2016/17
- ☐ Spring semester 2017

Q6: What was your host university in Lisbon?

- ☐ Universidade de Lisboa
- ☐ Universidade Nova de Lisboa
- ☐ ISCTE
- ☐ Universidade Católica Portuguesa
- ☐ Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa
- ☐ Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa
- ☐ Universidade Lusíada
- ☐ Universidade Lusófona
- ☐ Other:

Q7: What is/was your field of study?

- ☐ Arts
- ☐ Business/Economics
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Health Sciences
- ☐ Humanities
- ☐ Natural Sciences
- ☐ Social Sciences
- ☐ Other:

Q8: As part of which level of degree did you do the Erasmus programme?

- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Master

Q9: Was Portugal the first choice for doing the Erasmus programme?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q10: Which country was your first choice for doing your exchange?

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czech Republic
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Liechtenstein
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Macedonia
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands

- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Rumania
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Switzerland
- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ UK
- ☐ Other:

Q11: Are you currently living/working in a country other than your origin?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q12: In which country/region are you currently living/working?

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czech Republic
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy



- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Liechtenstein
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Macedonia
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Rumania
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Switzerland
- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ UK
- ☐ Africa
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ Middle East
- ☐ North America
- ☐ South America
- ☐ Other:

Q13: Choose 3 primary reasons that led you to participate in the Erasmus programme and rank them. Start with the most important reason (drag and drop).

- I wanted to live on my own for a period
- I wanted to learn another language/improve my language skills
- I wanted to develop soft skills
- I wanted to improve and widen my career prospects in the future
- I wanted to enhance my future employability abroad
- I wanted to learn more about the culture of the destination

- I wanted to try new things and have new experiences
- I wanted to meet people from different cultures
- I wanted to get to know the country better as I consider it as a future workplace
- I was interested in the opportunity of benefitting from an interesting curriculum that complemented my studies
- Other:

Q14: To what extend were you interested in the culture of Portugal before your stay?

- 1 – significantly interested
- 2 – slightly interested
- 3 – slightly uninterested
- 4 – not interested

Q15: To what extend were you interested in the culture of Portugal after your stay?

- 1 – significantly interested
- 2 – slightly interested
- 3 – slightly uninterested
- 4 – not interested

Q16: The participation in the Erasmus programme has increased my cultural knowledge.

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q17: I enjoyed visiting various cultural attractions in Portugal during my exchange.

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q18: After completion of the Erasmus programme, I can identify/feel comfortable with the Portuguese culture.

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q19: Do you have any additional comments related to the cultural experience during the Erasmus programme?

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q21: I am considering to work abroad in the future.

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q22: I am considering to work in Portugal in the future.

- 1 – totally agree
- 2 – slightly agree
- 3 – slightly disagree
- 4 – disagree

Q23: Choose 3 primary factors that are important for your future work decision and rank them. Start with the most important factor (drag and drop).

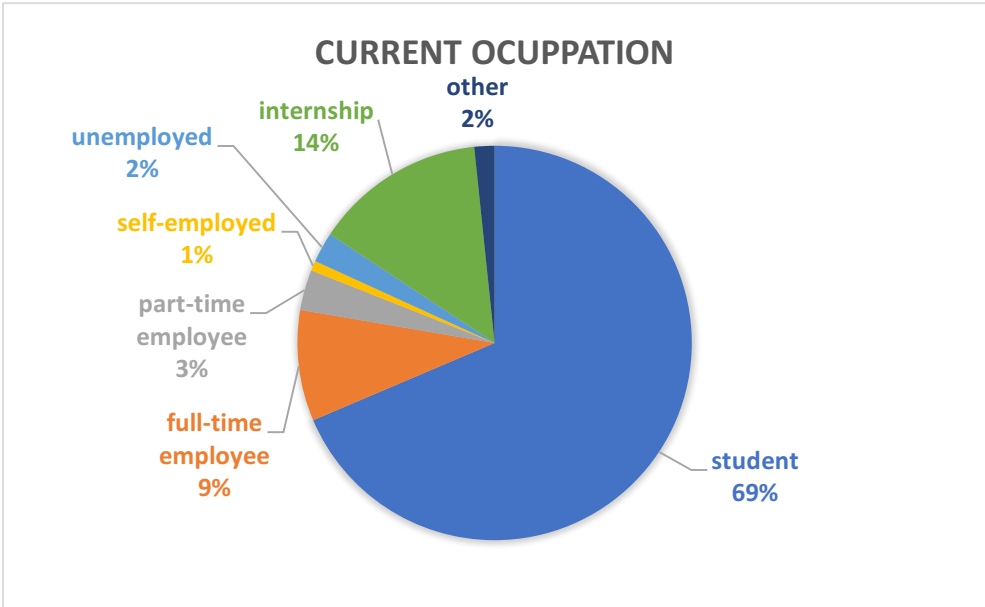
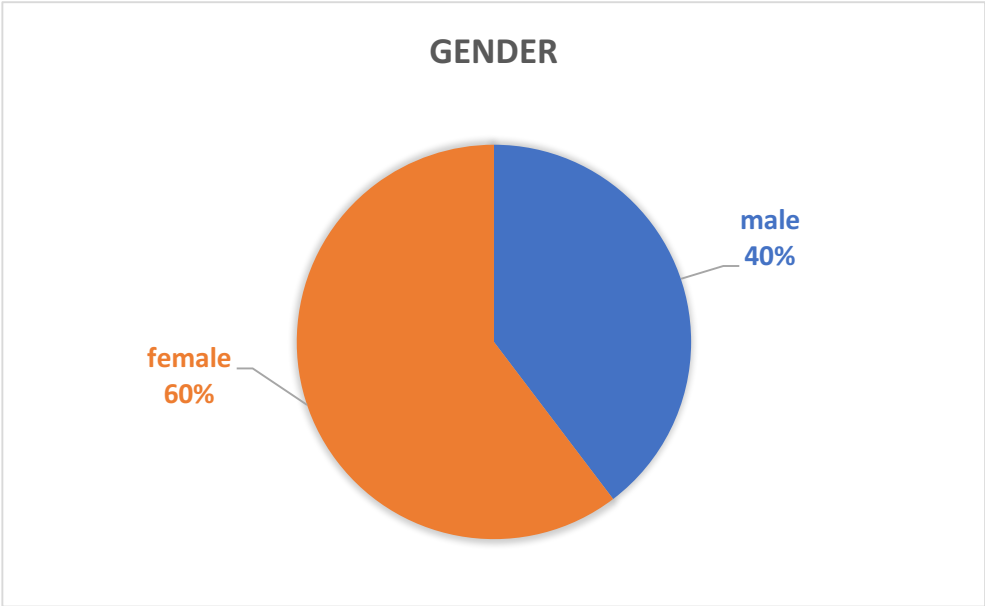
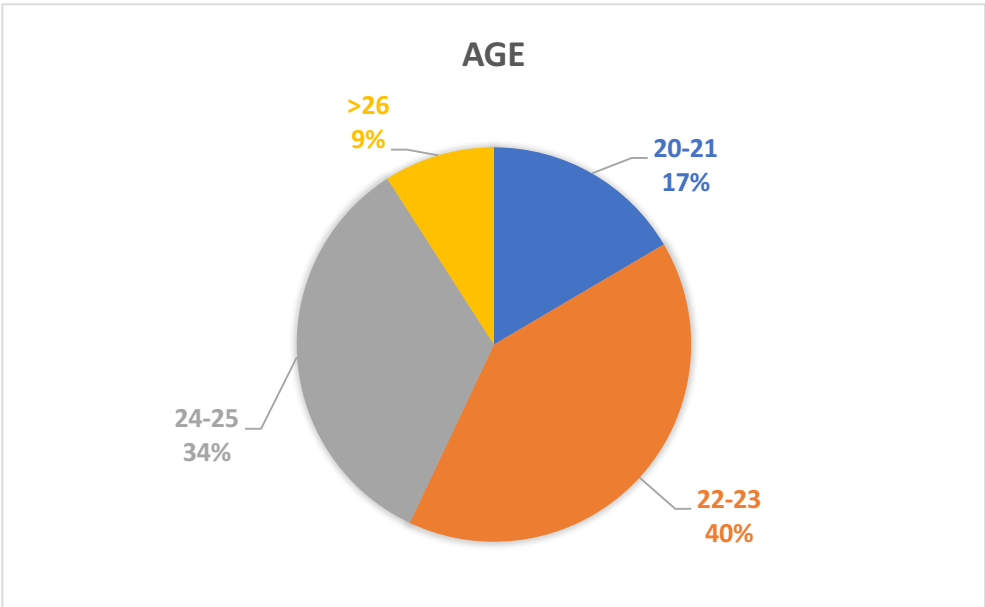
- Salary
- Work content
- Colleagues
- Work/life balance
- International environment
- Opportunity to work abroad

- Specific country to work in
- Cultural circumstances where the work is embedded
- Other:

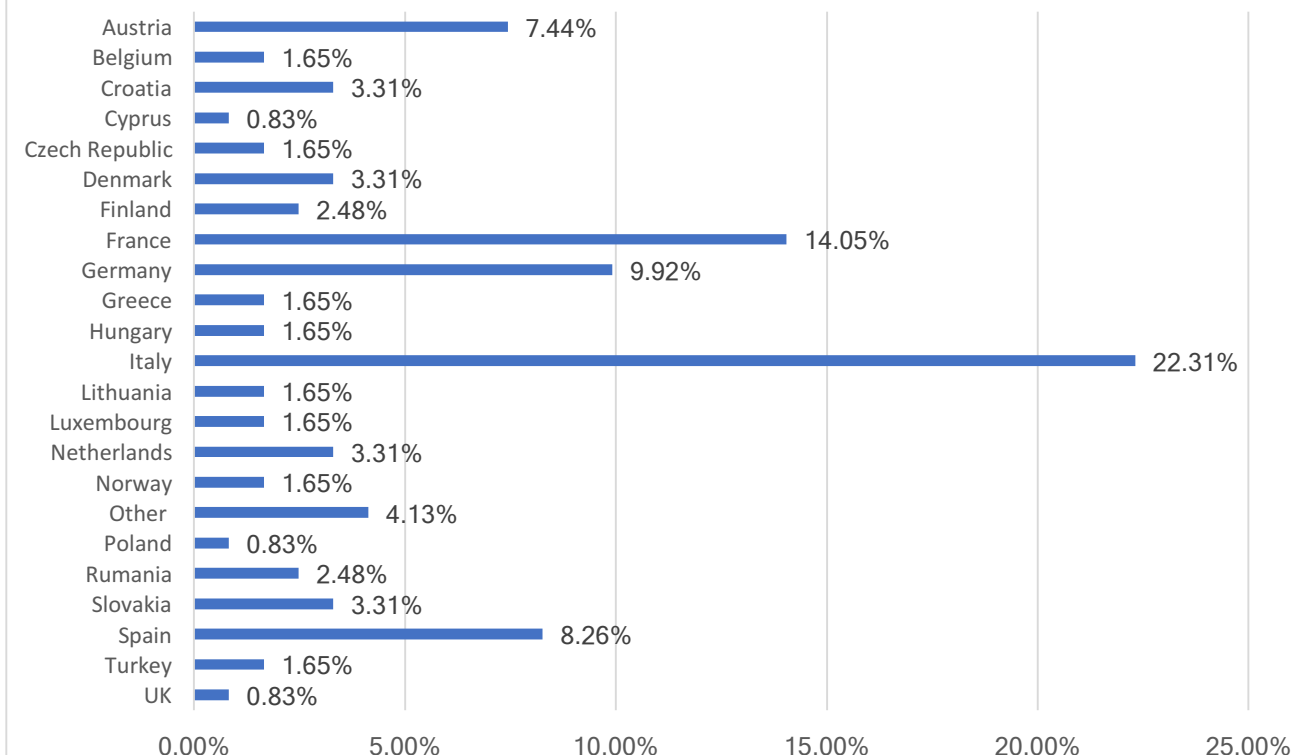
## **Appendix 2: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews**

- How old are you?
- What is your country of origin?
- In which year/semester have you done the Erasmus programme?
- What was your host university in Lisbon?
- What are/were you studying?
- What were your motivations to participate in the Erasmus programme?
- Was this your first international experience, apart from vacation?
- How was your experience overall?
- What was the most memorable experience?
- Were you interested in the Portuguese culture before/after your stay?
- What was the main difference between the Portuguese culture and the culture of your home country?
- Can you image to work abroad in the future?
  - o If yes, why and where?
  - o If no, why not?

**Appendix 3: Demographics**



### Country of origin



### Semester of the Erasmus programme

